

Palestine

FRIENDS IN PALESTINE

*The Story of Service In and
About Ram Allah*



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And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw
all men unto Me.

“Not for one race nor one color alone,
Was He flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone;
Not for you only—for all men He died.”

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STORY OF THE RAM ALLAH MISSION

Eli and Sibyl Jones, Pioneers to Palestine

IN the middle part of the last century Eli Jones and his wife, Sibyl Jones, ministers in the Society of Friends, were often called to leave their quiet home on the shores of the beautiful lake at South China, Maine, to carry to other parts of the world the good news of the One who came to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to open the prisons of those that were bound. In following the voice of the Spirit they were led to many parts of the United States, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, to the west coast of Africa, Ireland, England, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Southern France and Palestine. Wherever these two devoted followers of the cross were called to go they carried encouragement and spiritual help, speaking words of peace to many a troubled soul and giving practical suggestions for the bettering of humanity.

It has been truthfully said that man is incurably religious and perhaps this is nowhere more apparent than in the small section of the world sacred to the three great religions, Judaism, Mohammedanism and Christianity. Everything connected with Palestine is religious. Her rulers have been religious rulers, her wars have been religious wars, her bitter feuds and bloody massacres have been caused by the followers of one religion trying to crush out the followers of another.

To this country, so small in size, yet so great in history, once rising so high as to give to the world the most sublime teaching that man has ever known, and then sinking so low as to be overshadowed by ignorance, superstition and sin; to this country where each individual is classified according to



A Palestine Maiden

religion, Eli and Sibyl Jones felt called to take back the light as it is in Christ Jesus. And here today is a flourishing vine planted nearly sixty years ago by their loving hands.

Ram Allah, a City Set on a Hill

Ram Allah, Palestine, is situated on one of the hills of Benjamin. It is 2850 feet above the Mediterranean Sea, which

can be plainly seen from the town although thirty-five miles away. Ram Allah is noted for its pure highland air and fine commanding view of the surrounding country. From the house-tops can be seen Mizpah, where Samuel judged Israel, Gibeon where Solomon chose wisdom, Jerusalem, ten miles south crowning the mountain ridge, and Jaffa on the plain by the sea. Beerli, the Beeroth of the Bible, is one mile east, and Bethel three miles to the north-east.

Primitive Peasant Life

At the time of the coming of Eli and Sibyl Jones but little educational work was being carried on and that for boys. Even then only a few men could read. The dwelling houses were very poorly ventilated; none of them had glass windows. The doors were low and placed in the corners of the houses, so that the family might sleep out of the range of the fire of enemies, who had a way of shooting through the doors and windows. Some houses in Ram Allah still show the bullet



A Peasant Family

holes, relics of that time. No kerosene was then brought to the country nor did they have any candles. Their only lamp was a little dish of olive oil, in which a bit of cloth served as a wick. Not a single family had plates. All ate from a big wooden bowl with their hands, except a few of the richest who had wooden spoons. Their fuel was wood or the dried dung of cattle. Bedsteads were unknown. All slept on straw mats on the floor. Many of the above conditions are still found in Palestine, but in the villages where schools have been established they are slowly giving place to better ways of living.

During the first twenty years of this history, the work at Ram Allah was largely under the supervision of English Friends, and several times during this period they sent committees of their own members to inspect the work in the field. Some of the strongest members of the Ram Allah Monthly Meeting of today were converted and brought into the Society during that period. These English Friends purchased land at Ram Allah and built a stone mission house. This is now the oldest part of the girls' boarding school. When finished, the house was occupied by the families of Jacob Hishmeh, who had been the dragoman for Eli and Sibyl Jones, and Dr. George Hassenaur, who had just arrived from England. The doctor, a German by birth, had been reared in Palestine and spoke Arabic fluently. After a medical course in London he and his wife had charge of the work at Ram Allah for five years. He opened a dispensary and found many ways to preach the gospel as he labored to alleviate the suffering of those about him.

Division of the Field: Brummana and Ram Allah

Five years after Friends began mission work in Ram Allah they began work also in Brummana, Mount Lebanon. Theophilus Waldemeier was engaged as teacher there and soon two day schools were opened. The work grew until it comprised ten day schools, a boys' boarding school, a girls' board-

ing school and a native monthly meeting. In all of this work New England and English Friends labored together until in 1887 it seemed best to divide the two schools, English Friends taking Brummana and New England Yearly Meeting assuming the entire support and control of the work at Ram Allah. It continued to be so administered and supported until 1918 when it became a part of the work of the American Friends Board of Foreign Missions.



A Village Child

Friends Girls School

The Foreign Mission Committee of New England Yearly Meeting assumed complete control of the work at Ram Allah July 1, 1888. At this time it seemed best that some members of the Committee should visit Ram Allah to secure legal titles to the property and to attend to the details of administration. Therefore, Timothy B. Hussey and his wife, Anna M. Hussey, and Charles M. Jones accompanied by Timothy Hussey's sister, Sarah Hussey, and Joseph J. Mills, president of Earlham College, sailed from America January 1, 1889. It was not an easy task that the Friends had undertaken. The work of reconstruction is always attended with difficulties. On arriving, they found an empty house and were confronted with the task of continuing work started by others and of opening a girls' boarding school, without knowing where to look for matron, teachers, girls or even furniture. Having no knowledge of the language of the land, they had to transact business by means of interpreters. But there was much to encourage them. The day school for boys and one for girls, also the mixed school which had been opened in the west part of Ram Allah, were all in a healthy condition. The medical work, which had been left in the hands of a dispenser, was giving much physical aid and comfort in and near the village.

Preparations for the Girls' Work

The first work undertaken was to prepare the mission house and grounds for a boarding school for girls. The Friends had long since realized that there is not much hope for a nation if its women are kept in ignorance and degradation. They realized also that an entire change of environment was needed if the girls were to be properly trained for lives of usefulness.

In order to furnish the mission home for the girls, Timothy



Graduating Class, 1926

Hussey made a trip to Beirut where he bought bedsteads, blankets, cloth for mattresses, etc. These things were brought by ship one hundred and twenty miles down the coast to Jaffa and by camels up through the hills of Judæa to Ram Allah. A trip to Jericho was necessary to get wool for the mattresses. Anna and Sarah Hussey, with a few native helpers, worked hard to get ready sheets, pillow cases, pillows, table linen, mattresses, and all that would be necessary for a home for fifteen or twenty persons.

After the mission home was furnished, the work of finding girls whose parents were willing to allow them to enter the boarding school was begun. Different villages were visited and the chief men as well as the parents were consulted on the subject. In one village twenty men gathered in a guest room to meet with the foreigners. In the course of the conversation that ensued one of them said, "Talk about educating women, you might as well talk about educating those cows out there on the hillside."

The clothes were furnished free for the girls. No tuition was asked from the parents and yet several disappointments were experienced in trying to get enough girls to fill the home. It was thought best to bring girls from different villages so that when they were educated they could be sent back to their own homes as teachers among their own people. By perseverance twelve girls were obtained from six different places and later on three more were received. All of these were from Christian families.

The First Teacher

Katie Gabriel was chosen as the first teacher, a young woman of rare personality and good attainments in both character and experience who won the confidence and love of not only her pupils but also of the village people. It is not often given to a woman to offer her life so completely to a work of loving sacrifice, and it is now more than thirty-five years that she has watched over the interests of the Girls School. After



Girls School Building

eighteen years of service as head teacher, Katie Gabriel became matron and the present principal took her place. The sweet spirit of the school has been carried on from one group of girls to another under the direction of the devoted women who are still presiding over the school.

As parents began to appreciate what was being done for their children they were asked to provide the clothing. It was not until the year 1900, however, that they began paying small sums as tuition. These sums have been increased from time to time until today the school fees are \$125.00 per year beside incidentals. This is sufficient to meet the expenses except the allowances of the regularly appointed American workers.

In the summer of 1925 the Girls' School was remodeled—nearly the whole of a third floor being added. It can now accommodate seventy-five girls as boarders and twenty-five day pupils. The building is both beautiful and well equipped. The Sarah J. Swift Assembly Hall impresses all with its sweet simplicity and quiet dignity.

The Daily Program

The daily program begins at six o'clock with the ringing of the bell, when every girl must arise, dress and air her bed. The teacher in charge taps a little bell and there is perfect quiet in the big dormitories while each girl kneels by her bed in silent prayer. After breakfast each girl makes her own bed and then goes to the part of the house where her work is assigned for that week. Some of the older girls prepare the school rooms, others dry dishes, some have charge of dining rooms, office, parlor, teachers' rooms or guest room, and the younger ones do simple tasks about the home. Every nook and corner of the house and grounds is assigned to someone and in every part there is a teacher in charge to see that the work is well done. By eight o'clock everything is in such order

that the workers need not hesitate to take visitors to any part of the institution.

After chapel exercises class work begins. About one-third of this is in English and two-thirds in Arabic. The Bible lesson has an important place. Each class has a different teacher and the Book of Books is studied quite systematically. The common branches, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar and history, all have their places. Physiology and hygiene are taught to all. The village people often sleep in closely-shut rooms, many of them full of smoke and foul with the smell of animals but when the children learn the benefits of good, pure air they are eager to have it. Gymnastics also have a place in the morning program.

The afternoon work varies with the day. Two afternoons are for recitations, the others are largely filled with mending, ironing, sewing or fancy work and sometimes the girls take a long walk to the valleys, returning with hands and baskets full of beautiful wild flowers.

Friends Boys School

When the Christian Endeavor Union of New England Yearly Meeting decided to be responsible for the support of a boys' boarding school at Rām Allah, the undertaking was approved by the Yearly Meeting, and Elihu and Almy Chase Grant were sent to take charge of this branch of the work. They reached Ram Allah in April, 1901, and for the following six months were occupied in visiting other boarding schools for boys, furnishing the house, preparing the course of study and studying Arabic. Those who have followed have been pleased with the splendid foundation which was laid at this time. The moral and religious standards were placed high, and the school is still trying to maintain the ideals set for it in the beginning. At the outset the parents of each boy were asked to furnish all clothing and to pay at least twenty dollars to-

ward the board and tuition. This amount has been gradually increased until at the present time the fees received cover the current expenses, with the exception of the allowances of the regularly appointed American workers.

"The Boys Do the Work"

When a boy is born in Palestine there is a time of great rejoicing, giving of gifts, feasts and general merry making. As he develops he is much loved and admired, because a boy is considered a distinct mark of God's favor. There is a general feeling in the country that manual labor is degrading for educated people and consequently in order to teach the boys that any kind of work which is honest is honorable, the Friends have tried to inculcate a respect for labor. The boys do the



Boys School Building

work about the school, such as making their beds, sweeping, drying dishes, waiting on tables, caring for the teachers' rooms, and keeping the building generally tidy. They also take a great interest in their gardens and this creates much friendly rivalry.

Since the war the status of education in Palestine has changed so much owing largely to the fact that many elementary schools have been opened by the government, that boys enter much better prepared than before, and the intellectual standards of the school have consequently been raised to meet the higher demands. Graduates from the school are admitted to the American University at Beirut without examination and many of our boys have continued their work there, while others have taken up teaching or taken positions with the government or in commercial pursuits.

The large airy building with its modern equipment, completed in 1914, but not used as a school until after the war, provides a good home for about seventy boys. This number is supplemented by thirty day pupils from the Christian village of Ram Allah and the Moslem village of Beerri. Recently a laboratory has been equipped for the teaching of physics. Chemistry and botany will be taught in the near future.

Fine Religious Life

The religious life of the boys and girls permeates the activities of both boarding schools. They each have religious organizations suited to their age period, and the teachers in both schools strive to assist the children to attain to a well-grounded Christian experience. Many of the children before they leave school have definitely accepted Christ as their Lord and Master, and others give evidence of a deepened spiritual experience.

Since the war there has been an increasing desire for education among both boys and girls of Mohammedan homes.

As a rule about one-third of the boys and ten per cent of the girls are from Moslem families. In 1924 was graduated the first Mohammedan boy. There is undoubtedly an increasingly sympathetic attitude toward the Christian faith.

Although, as has been stated, both schools are meeting their current expenses, this can be done only by admitting pupils who can pay the fees of the schools. Sometimes in one of the villages a boy or girl is found who gives promise of special usefulness if education could be provided, and a few scholarships to help such cases are greatly needed.

The Friends Mission, situated in the land of the Bible and directly in the path of tourists, is fortunate in having many visits from Friends coming from all sections of Quakerdom, and preachers, scholars and missionaries of world re-



Faculty, Boys School

noun. These often consent to speak to the young people and contribute to the religious influence of the work.

Among the Villages

A description of one of the village schools will do for all. The children sit on low benches and the older ones have long desks on which to write. The tiny children sit on a straw mat on the floor. Many a girl could not come to school if she could not bring her baby brother or sister to be cared for while the mother is baking bread or helping the father in the field. So the ages found in the day schools range from two to twenty years. The babies play with blocks and picture books, while the five-year olds have slates and charts upon which is written the Arabic alphabet. The morning hours are filled with lessons—reading, spelling, writing, simple arithmetic, geography, hygiene and Bible. In the afternoon the little girls are taught how to sew, doing plain patchwork, learning the native cross-stitch with which their dresses are embroidered, making simple garments and knitting stockings. Then they sing, repeat some portion of Scripture from memory and say a prayer together; thus closes a happy day at school.

The School at Taiyibeh

The school at Taiyibeh is flourishing, the people cheerfully paying the rent for the school and the teacher's living room. For a number of years the annual attendance has averaged eighty-five, thus necessitating the employment of two teachers. On Sunday afternoons the teacher has a Sunday School for women and children, and Friends have been co-operating with an English mission in holding preaching services there twice a month.

The other village schools are all in Mohammedan villages; Attara, Beitunia and Deir Ghassaneh. The smallest school is in Attara, one of the most bigoted Moslem villages in the dis-

trict. The women there are especially forlorn and oppressed. The girls are married very young, often at the age of eleven or twelve years. Three men of the village, who are very fanatical Moslems make it extremely difficult for the girls who wish to go to school. Their threats and beatings keep many away, but others persist in coming in spite of the opposition, and the village is slowly opening up to Christian influences.

Brides Leave School

Deir Ghassaneh is an hour's ride by motor from Ram Allah over very rocky roads.¹ It is the center of a large group of Mohammedan villages of rather superior intellectual quality, but where education for women has been unknown. In the school in that village there are two small rooms which are furnished rent free by the town. In one room a veteran teacher holds sway over twenty-five girls, many of whom are almost grown. Their faces are alert with the hunger to learn



A Village School

and they are progressing by leaps and bounds, but unfortunately many of them must leave school, oftentimes as young as twelve years, to become brides. From that time until they are about thirty they must remain closely confined to their own homes and the surrounding court.

In the other room are forty-six little girls, some of kindergarten age, and two classes of children who are reading and doing number work. A part of the teaching staff has been supplied by the Girls Boarding School at Ram Allah. In all the classes they have Bible lessons and the older girls say that they like these best of all. They often say to their teachers, "We want to learn to live right like you." The eagerness of these girls for education and for the true light inspires the heart of every one who visits the school.

Beitunia is an hour's walk from Ram Allah. The school there is similar to the one just described, although it has but one teacher and a smaller proportion of large girls. About fifty girls are enrolled and the community cheerfully pays the rent of the schoolroom. The people of this village show a very friendly and neighborly spirit toward the mission.

Treating Sore Eyes

The effect of these schools is not so much the little book learning the children receive as the cleanly habits and the high ideals of living which the teachers try to instill into them. From a physical point of view the effect of the teaching on the care of the eyes has been most noticeable. Twice daily the teachers make their rounds among their little charges, treating any sore eyes, and as a result, there is a great difference in this respect between the school children and the little people of the villages where there are no schools.

It is the great hope and faith of the Mission and the teachers that the spiritual vision of these children is being helped in greater measure than their physical sight. With great

patience and love the teachers are striving to present to them the idea of God as a loving Heavenly Father, to teach them the story of Christ, and to awaken in them His ideals of noble living. It is a great task and one requiring infinite sacrifice and faith on the part of these devoted teachers.

Naameh Shahla, Bible Woman

In the fall of 1923 Naameh Shahla, a young Friend of the Ram Allah meeting was released from her teaching to do the work of an evangelist in the Mohammedan villages around Ram Allah. Since that time she has faithfully carried on this work.

She starts from her home in the early morning on her little donkey with the donkey-boy walking behind. She carries over her shoulder a little leather bag which holds her Bible and small bottles containing medicine such as eye-drops and iodine.



Some of Naameh Shahla's Urchins

When she enters a village her arrival is heralded by groups of smiling little grimy urchins who scurry away to tell their mothers that Sitt (Lady) Naameh has come. She calls on the sick and afflicted ones of the village and then gathers a group of women and girls about her in someone's house or doorway for a meeting. She always has in mind some definite gospel message when she enters a village, but very often some circumstance or question will call out from her a message on quite another topic from the one she had in mind.

The Interesting Crowds

These crowds around Naameh are always interesting. While she talks, women continue their work of cleaning wheat, patching garments, kneading dough, weaving straw mats, embroidering in the native cross stitch, etc. People come and go, chickens cackle and flop about, young goats with their sober and comical air walk into the midst of the group and have to be driven off or held quiet in somebody's lap. Children stare and chatter and wiggle. Babies wail and have to be patted and nursed. Naameh goes calmly on with her message, and there are always intently listening faces in the group.

The women ask many eager, childlike questions on religious matters and practical problems of life. Quite often they bring family or neighborhood quarrels for Naameh to help settle, or tell her about some sick person for whom she can prescribe a simple home remedy. Very often she advises and helps them to send a sick person to a government doctor or hospital for treatment.

After the meeting the women crowd around with their babies to have their eyes treated. Often she treats every one in the room, old and young, especially in summer when the eye diseases are at their worst. Sometimes men will come to have their eyes treated or wounds touched with iodine, and stay to the meeting. From three to five such meetings are usu-

ally held in different quarters of the village before she goes home. Some of the women follow her from meeting to meeting so that she often changes her topic during the day.

Thus this faithful bible woman ministers to twenty-two Moslem villages within a radius of five miles from Ram Allah. In losing her life daily amid the sordid surroundings of these ignorant and needy village folk she has found that fullest life of which Jesus taught and she is a very happy person. People come to her for help in every conceivable kind of human need, and her kindly response to the need never fails.

A part of the time a trained nurse has accompanied Naameh Shahla and assisted greatly in the alleviation of suffering. If regular funds are available this may well become a permanent addition to the village evangelistic work.

As Friends are a non-proselyting body and the work of the Mission through all these years has been chiefly among people who are nominally Christians, the aim has been to up-build the Kingdom of God rather than the Society of Friends in Palestine. In fact, the Mission has been loath to draw away those who have witnessed to a change of heart and life from the mother church in which they have been reared. However, from the early days of the Mission, there have been some who have been so attracted by the Friends' way of worship and their understanding of the manner of the Kingdom of God, that they have wished to become Friends. Consequently, many years ago there was organized a Monthly Meeting, consisting chiefly of half a dozen families. Sometimes, as at home, some have become disaffected and left the meeting and others have joined, so that through the years the meeting has just about held its own. At times some of the young people, teachers or pupils, in our schools have desired to join and have done so. After graduation many of these have been out of touch with Friends, but most have remained loyal to the principles for which Friends stand.



The Meeting House

For many years the Friends and the children from the boarding schools worshipped in a rented room in the market place of the village, but in 1906 a site was purchased in the edge of the village by the Monthly Meeting, and three years later through the generosity of interested Friends in America, a comfortable meeting house was erected which stands just half way between the girls' and boys' buildings. There were already four churches in the village, but this Friends meeting house in its simplicity, without pictures, images, incense or candles, is in such marked contrast to the Oriental churches that Moslems can and do come to our place of worship without anything to shock them by its semblance of idolatry.

The New Mission Home

The first building erected was a mission house, but after that was made over into a boarding school for girls in 1889, all the missionaries lived in one or the other of the boarding

schools. For many years there was a felt need for a mission house separate from the schools which should be the center for activities not directly connected with the boarding schools, which should house a mission family. This was made possible in 1925 through the generous gifts of Friends in New England and other places, and a neat little bungalow now stands on the hill-top directly north of the Boys School building commanding a wonderful view of Moab, the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, Mizpah and the Mediterranean.

The Work Still in the Making

Thus the history of the Friends Mission in the Holy Land, which has been written by so many devoted lives through nearly sixty years, is still in the making. In the district north of Jerusalem are a monthly meeting, two boarding schools, several day schools and an itinerating ministry, employing about thirty teachers and helpers. It is a friendly work, founded and conducted through the devotion of many Friends, and in obedience to the last command of our Lord and Master. It is our testimony in Bible Lands. It represents a distinct ideal of peace and good will. Always at midnight in America Friends in Ram Allah are entering upon a new day of endeavor.

The work in Ram Allah and its neighborhood is an inspiration and responsibility. It has been an uplift and stimulus to hundreds of young lives. All that has been accomplished has been possible because of the loyal devotion and practical support of Friends in America. And the Mission purposes to continue sharing with these people the Christ who came to transform, comfort and guide human life.

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